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III

THE SCHOOL AGE

From Six to Eleven Years

857 The school-going age for the Luo girl is characterised
868 by its transitional nature. It is chiefly a time of useful activity, for it is this age to which society has assigned the duty of nursing, and young girls begin and end their nursing service during this period. The mother now transforms the free day of play activity into real work and mobilizes the potential abilities of the young girl for her traditional education. The benefit reaped by the family is a secondary result, because the training given at this stage is part of a long process of education for married life. So far as the girl is concerned, the interest shown in nursing is more intense in the earlier phase of this age—at about eight to nine years.

With the increasing maturity of her mental life, the young girl begins to take an interest in the household duties of older girls, and thus associates nursing with girls of a younger age. We therefore find among the older girls of the age-group a section which despises nursing. The general domestic work of the age includes collecting firewood, fetching water in small containers, and keeping the fire burning while food cooks during the absence of the mother. Firewood is collected from [313] round the village or sometimes further afield in company with older girls. In the groups the older girls may direct the younger ones where to find good firewood, but most of the collecting is done individually by the girl herself. The quantity carried increases as the child [312] grows older, and the container in which water is carried also varies similarly. When her mother is away, the

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than themselves. As the girls grow older, feeding at odd times is restricted. The girls eat with the mother while their brothers eat with the father. The mother of the family takes particular care that the brothers get some food and even though she may go without herself, she sees that the children eat.

Female education at school-going age. The traditional education as given by the parents is strictly utilitarian. Its main aim is to prepare the girl for her future as a wife in a family and as a mother of children.

The girls accompany their mothers or older associates to fetch water, the younger ones being given a very little water in a small pot, usually used for milking. Larger pots are given to the girl as she grows older and stronger, the girls of six and seven being eager to imitate their older playmates. A few of the male children like to go to fetch water with similar containers, but their mothers do not encourage them. The mother of a young girl watches her carefully to see if she is interested in imitating these activities before giving any encouragement.

When the girl, at the age of eight or nine, expresses a desire to dig, the mother takes her to a garden early in the morning to let her do so, and releases her at about eight o'clock before the sun becomes too hot. At this time too, if a grinding stone is available, the mother teaches her child to grind corn, this being a continuation of the interest in grinding soil shown at play. The older girls of the group are instructed in giving gruel to the young children they nurse.

In the preparation of food, the girls first learn how to prepare gruel for the babies. But proper cooking comes very gradually and they learn it under the constant observation of the adult members of the family. The food cooked is first tasted by the parents only, when criticisms are openly made and encouragement of future

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593 with the male children. Maternal control over the
855 young girl is very great and remains about the same when she reaches adolescence, though at this time the father's control becomes increasingly essential in keeping the growing personalities of the family in order.

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Young Girls Going to Fetch Water

857 The Beginning of Specialised Activities
868 The school-going age marks the period when male and female children part company. Young girls become increasingly occupied with domestic work, such as fetching water and firewood, tending babies and watching the fire, while male children of the same age continue to play in groups for a much longer period. Apart from herding, which is now less general than in the past, boys of school-